



# Fact Sheet

*Senator Jay Rockefeller, West Virginia*

## **Senator Rockefeller's Ongoing Efforts to Protect Coal Miners from Black Lung Disease**

Throughout his career, Senator Rockefeller has pushed for strong health and safety protections for West Virginia's coal miners. In addition to his efforts to improve mine safety standards and protect pension and health care benefits for retirees, he has taken several steps to prevent Black Lung disease and provide miners who are suffering with the benefits they deserve.

- **Secured progress on regulations to prevent Black Lung disease.** In August 2013, Rockefeller sent a letter to the President, pushing him to act quickly on regulations to protect miners. Two weeks later, the Administration submitted regulations that will reduce miners' exposure to respirable dust to the Office of Management and Budget for review, which is the final stage in the regulatory process. These long-overdue regulations are now one step closer to being implemented.
- **Held a roundtable discussion in Bluefield to discuss ways to prevent the disease and treat miners already diagnosed.** In a meeting with Black Lung patients, medical experts, advocates and community leaders, Rockefeller sought input from a broad coalition of stakeholders with the goal of eliminating the disease.
- **Introduced the Black Lung Health Improvements Act.** In July 2013, Rockefeller introduced legislation that requires the Department of Labor to update its regulations to lower miners' exposure to dust that causes Black Lung; expands miners' access to their medical records during the Black Lung program's claims process; creates a program to help miners secure legal representation when applying for benefits; and makes grant funding available for research into the disease.
- **Pushed for timely payment of Black Lung benefits.** In May 2012, after hearing from several miners whose Black Lung benefit payments were not delivered on time, Rockefeller's office contacted the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Labor, urging the departments to quickly resolve the problem and deliver payments to miners and their families.
- **Supported provisions to make it easier for long-time miners and spouses to access Black Lung benefits.** In December 2009, Rockefeller supported Black Lung related amendments offered by Senator Byrd to the health care reform law.

One provision entitles long-time miners with disabling lung impairments to a presumption that their disability was caused by Black Lung. The second provision automatically entitles widows to Black Lung benefits if the miner had been awarded benefits at the time of death. Both provisions became law as part of the Affordable Care Act in March 2010.

- **Released a report into barriers that miners and their families face when applying for Black Lung benefits.** In October 2009, Rockefeller released a study from the Government Accountability Office that identified legal and administrative barriers that miners face when applying for the federal Black Lung Benefits Program. This study was conducted at Rockefeller's request in his capacity as Chairman of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health Care.